Lovely Strange Dark

ULTRABAROQUE DEPROGRAMMER

BY ITOU SEIKOU & ASADA TORAO

CHAPTER 26

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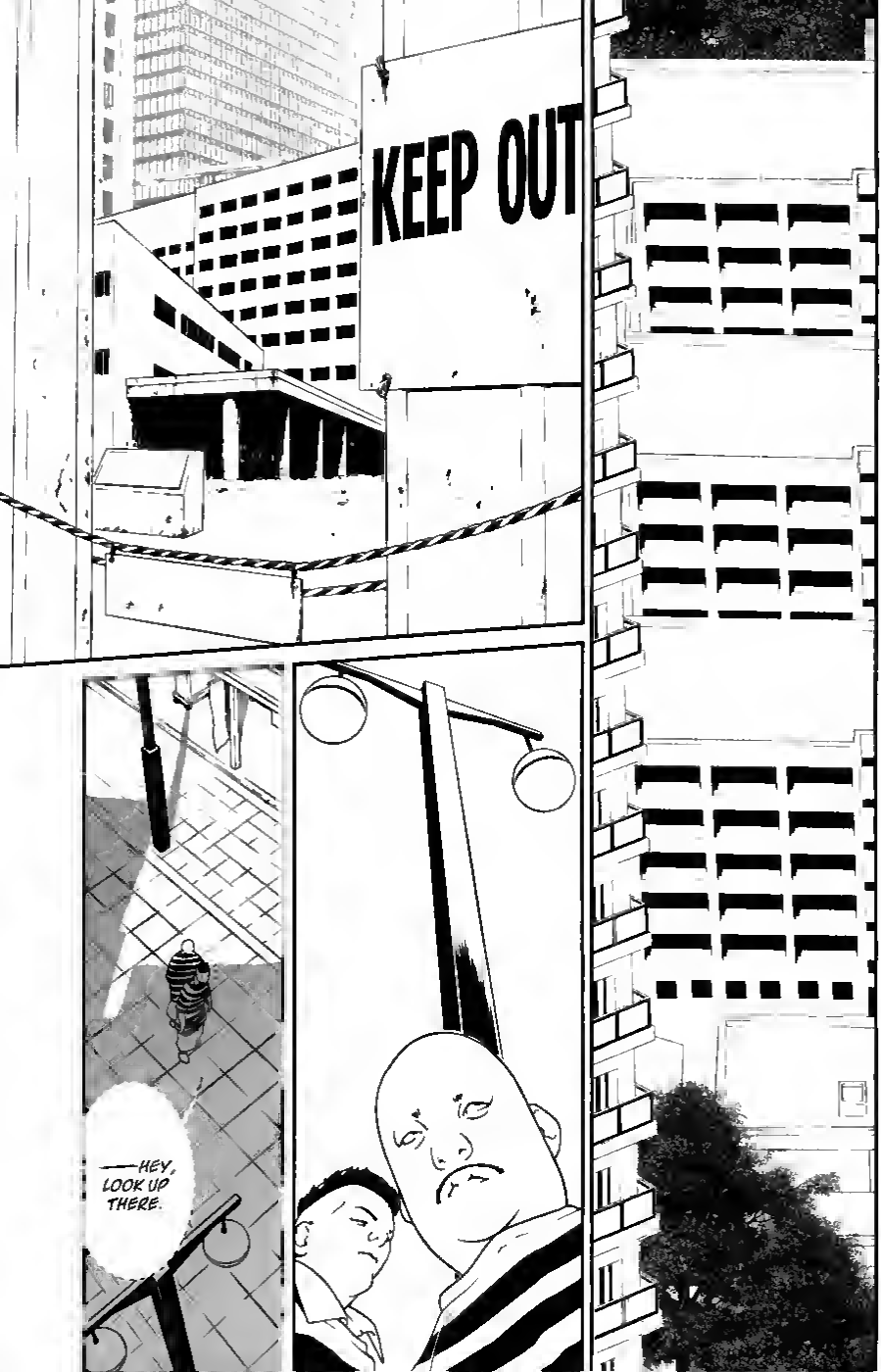

KEEP OUT
—HEY, LOOK UP THERE.

AREN'T THOSE GUYS WITH UGLY RAINBOW?
GO BACK TO YOUR OWN COUNTRY, FOREIGNERS!
WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT, YOU DAMN ILLEGALS!?

CHAPTER 26 TELE-DEPROGRAM 7

SNAP
YEAH, I REALLY OWE YOU ONE, YUUZOU

HUH? WHAT?
IT'S OVER? IS THIS THE REAL YOU, DEPRO-GRAMMER?
WHAT HAPPENED? DID I PASS OUT?
NO... HE JUST SUDDENLY GOT UP ——
ALL GOOD? HOW DO YOU FEEL?
YOU SHOULD CHECK YOUR PHONE FIRST. IT'S BLINKING
CRAP, CHIKA LEFT ME A MESSAGE.

I just started to notice
that the ground was unstable and shaking
when I suddenly blacked out
OH YEAH, THAT
SORRY ABOUT CALAVERA, WITH HIS RICE BRAN AND WHATEVER
I'M MORE WORRIED IF HE GOT OUT OK
IT'D BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO BE DEAD,
SINCE I'M VERY MUCH ALIVE

THEY SHOULD BE FINE.
HUH? SO THEY'RE ALWAYS THERE?

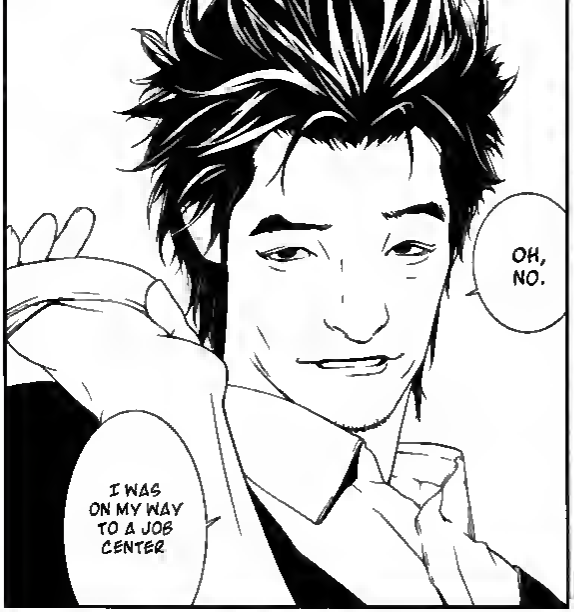
THOUGH SAYING THEY'RE "IN MY HEAD" MIGHT NOT BE QUITE RIGHT
THE BIG GUY AND THE BIRD ARE ALWAYS
IN YOUR HEAD?
YEAH.
WHEN YOU OPEN TWO WINDOWS, THE ONE ON TOP IS THE WORLD WE SEE
THE ONE HIDDEN BELOW IS THE WORLD THEY'RE IN.
HOW CAN I PUT THIS? FROM MY PERSPECTIVE,
IF YOU WANT TO COMPARE IT TO SOMETHING REAL, IT'S LIKE A COMPUTER SCREEN
JUST LIKE YOU'D CLICK THE ONE IN BACK AND IT'D POP UP,
IF I FOCUS ON THAT WINDOW, THOSE TWO ARE JUST THERE
THAT'S HOW THE TECHNIQUE WORKS

I'VE JUST ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO TALK TO THEM FREELY.
THOUGH ACTUALLY, I DON'T HAVE ANY MEMORIES OF TALKING TO OTHER DEPRO-GRAMMERS.
I MEAN, A LOT OF MY MEMORIES HAVE BEEN ERASED.
—UM...
I THINK THAT'S PRETTY OUT OF THE ORDINARY.
USUALLY, DEPROGRAM-MERS ONLY PARTITION THEMSELVES INTO THREE WHEN THEY'RE DEPROGRAM-MING SOME-ONE.
THAT'S THE STANDARD.
THAT'S THE STANDARD!?
YOU KNOW, THAT DOESN'T NECESSARILY MAKE YOU
THE BEST DEPROGRAM-MER IN THE WORLD.

How many people did I push hard enough to cripple?
The ground was littered with bones and ashes.
"Santa Muerte"
What was with those kids in the memory?
And that machine filtering my memories, there's no way I destroyed it completely.
On the day it is completely destroyed,
my mindscape will overflow
with both beautiful memories and memories dyed jet black.
Was she some kind of god?
What was that feeling? Like I had no regard for my own life
I WASN'T ACTUALLY
THINKING THAT...
Like it was me, but not me.
Did the old me act that arrogantly
while deprogramming?

RUMM
But I hope today's dive
let me regain enough ability that I can take on what's inside Nobiru——
MY MOM DID SOMETHING LIKE THAT
IT'S FOR PICKLING
WHAT'RE YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT?
HUH? WHAT'S RICE BRAN?

DOES HE LIKE MAKE JAM AND KNIT LACE?
HOW WOULD I KNOW? WE'RE DIFFERENT PEOPLE!
OH, BUT HE WAS STITCHING A SKULL
YUUZOU!
At least call him an old
JUST THAT THE GUY IN YOUR HEAD
ACTS SURPRISINGLY LIKE AN OLD LADY.
Man!!!
YOU'RE OFF ALREADY?
LET US AT LEAST BUY YOU DINNER.
YOU KNOW YOU'RE BROKE, SO WHERE'S THAT COMING FROM?
YOU EVEN BROUGHT ME CLOTHES
flop


OH, NO.
I WAS ON MY WAY TO A JOB CENTER

I HEARD YOU WERE WEARING A MIX OF STUFF YOU AND SORACHAI FOUND LYING AROUND, SO... WELL, THOSE ARE USED
UM, DID WE PULL YOU AWAY FROM ANYTHING?

HOP

UGH... LEECHING OFF SOMEONE WHO'S OUT JOB HUNTING... MAYBE I SHOULD VISIT A JOB CENTER TOO.
I CAN'T REMEMBER MY REAL NAME OR BANK ACCOUNT
DEPRO-GRAMMER

I'M SO SORRY!!

YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
AH, THIS IS CHIKA
MESSAGE PLAYBACK

STAY CLEAR OF THAT DEPRO-GRAM-MER
WHO'S WITH YOU NOW.
AND LISTEN TO ME.
SORACHAI, PLEASE GET BACK TO YOUR STUDIES.
BUT I'LL BE GONE FOR A BIT.
I DIDN'T SAY ANY-THING WHEN I LEFT THIS MORNING,

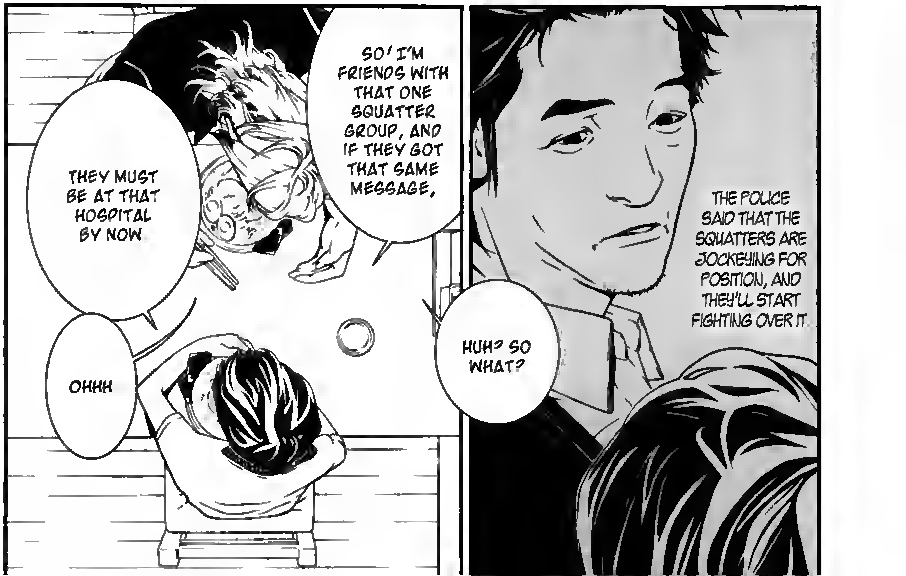
THIS WHOLE DISASTER IS HIS FAULT

SNAP...
SO...
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
NO... WELL—
THAT CHIKA DEFECTED TO THE ENEMY. OR WELL,
FROM THE VERY START I WAS THINKING SHE MIGHT BE ON THE OTHER SIDE.
LISTEN! IF THAT'S TRUE,
THEN EVERYTHING CHIKA'S DONE SO FAR
HAS BEEN A LIE.

I BET ONE MILLION DOLLARS ON YOU
I BET SHE WAS JUST LAUGHING ON THE INSIDE!
NO WAY! WE DON'T KNOW THAT YET!
BUT IF CHIKA IS PSYCHIC WORK...!
LET'S RETURN TO THE CREW ON-SITE
AND WHILE PRETENDING TO HELP, SHE'D HAVE LEAKED MY MOVEMENTS TO THE OTHER SIDE, RIGHT?
SHE KNOWS THE ENTIRE CODED MESSAGE, THE PROTECTOR LEFT ME
THEY'RE CHECKING IN WITH THE SECURITY GUARDS THAT WORK AT THE HOSPITAL TO HASTEN THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS
HEY, THAT'S WHERE CHIKA
...AUGUSTINE HOSPITAL, THE FIRE THAT ORIGINATED NEAR THE SECURITY ROOM WAS PUT OUT.
THE BODIES OF TWO MEN WERE DISCOVERED THERE ——
SHE MUST'VE BEEN LAUGHING WHEN SHE HEARD HIM!
I FIGURE
SHE KNOWS IF THE PROTECTOR'S BEEN CAPTURED AND EVERYTHING ELSE!

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT THE PHONE CALL IS HER WAY OF SAYING THAT SHE'S BEEN CAUGHT BY THE ENEMY
I WON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING UNTIL WE'RE SURE
MAYBE CHIKA'S THE ENEMY MAYBE YOU'RE THE DANGER
I DON'T BELIEVE IT.
HUH?
CLACK
SO SHE GOT RID OF THE SECURITY FOOTAGE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER-
THERE'S NO WAY WE KNOW THAT THIS FIRE HAS ANY-THING TO DO WITH THAT!
YOUR RAMEN'S READY!
I'LL LOOK FOR CHIKA
WAIT, SHOULDN'T YOU GET BACK TO YOUR STUDIES? YOU'VE GOTTA BE IN TROUBLE AT THIS POINT
I CAN MANAGE THIS BY MYSELF
I'M THE ONE PAYING FOR THIS MEAL. HOW WILL YOU MANAGE!?
Your creepy idea about her motives aside,
Chika really does worry about Nobiru.
I don't think she'd leave him behind and wander off somewhere.
And truth is, I'm worried about Nobiru too.
Once we figure out where Nobiru is, that's where we'll find Chika.

PLUS
WE MIGHT HAVE A LEAD ON HIM.
THERE WAS AN EMAIL THAT WENT AROUND ABOUT THAT HOSPITAL BEING CONDEMNED THAT'S THE ONE YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT, YUUZOU?
WHERE YOU SAID THE SINGING KID WAS——
YEAH


THE POLICE SAID THAT THE SQUATTERS ARE JOCKEYING FOR POSITION, AND THEY'LL START FIGHTING OVER IT.
HUH? SO WHAT?
SO I'M FRIENDS WITH THAT ONE SQUATTER GROUP, AND IF THEY GOT THAT SAME MESSAGE,
THEY MUST BE AT THAT HOSPITAL BY NOW
OHHH

WHO'RE YOU CALLING AN ILLEGAL?
WHAT WAS IT?
SOMETHING RAINBOW?
HAHA
PFFT
hehe

UGLY RAINBOW! WE KNOW IT'S YOU!
DAMN YOU, UGLY! GET DOWN HERE!
Click
LET'S GO!
WE'LL MEET UP WITH UGLY RAINBOW.
Excuse me!
I'll take some beer and dumplings!